

when our nation calls out for principled leadership from public officials, it is fitting that today we honor a professional who always went the extra mile to represent the under-represented and to promote equality within the community, the State of Florida, and the nation. During his distinguished career, John never forgot how important the little guy is to the American way of life.

Mr. Speaker, on Tuesday, June 29, an athletic park in Escambia County will be dedicated in Mr. Jones' honor. I can't think of a more fitting way to honor the life of a man who has been such an integral part of our community.

As we celebrate the accomplishments of John R. Jones, we can take pride in knowing that he has influenced so many people in a positive way. As a fellow elected official and as a friend, I appreciate the importance of dedication and devotion to public office. Mr. Jones' overall attitude and dedication to public service has been a model in the lives of the public servants that he has trained, supervised, and encouraged. His legacy will be a constant reminder that one person can make an extraordinary difference in the lives of many.

IN HONOR OF HUFF-N-PUFFERS

HON. DENNIS J. KUCINICH

OF OHIO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, June 24, 1999

Mr. KUCINICH. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honor the participants in the Huff-N-Puffers senior citizen baseball league.

This is a wonderful organization that provides and promotes physical activity for seniors. This is a great way for seniors to get together to socialize and partake in aerobic activities. The Huff-N-Puffers is open to anybody who is over the age of 65. This program was started in 1985 and has more than doubled in size since that time.

These senior citizens participate in many games and tournaments around the country as well as a championship tournament at the end of each season. They have a very busy schedule consisting of around 20 games against other teams in their league. These seniors are an inspiration to us all by getting the best out of what life has to offer.

My fellow colleagues please join me in honoring the dedication of these outstanding athletes.

CONGRATULATING MS. NICOLE SIEMINSKI

HON. JAY INSLEE

OF WASHINGTON

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, June 24, 1999

Mr. INSLEE. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to congratulate Ms. Nicole Sieminski for earning the honor of 1999 Class Valedictorian at Marysville-Pilchuck High School in Marysville, WA. Ms. Sieminski is the first member of the Tulalip Tribes to achieve this distinguished po-

sition at Marysville-Pilchuck High School. I want to commend her for her dedication and commitment to education. Clearly, great achievements such as this do not occur by chance. Ms. Sieminski worked very hard throughout her high school years. I know that the knowledge and skills she gained at Marysville-Pilchuck High School will help her reach even higher goals in the future.

INTRODUCTION OF H.R. 2337, THE
"MEDICARE COVERAGE INFORMATION
DECISION ACT OF 1999"

HON. JIM RAMSTAD

OF MINNESOTA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, June 24, 1999

Mr. RAMSTAD. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to introduce legislation to greatly improve the Medicare coverage decision-making process.

While Medicare law provides for the coverage of various categories of benefits, it does not specify a list of covered technologies and services. That's where the Health Care Financing Administration (HCFA) and its coverage process come in to play.

Medical technology and innovation play an important role in this critical health care program for America's seniors. As new life-enhancing and life-saving technologies and procedures are developed, and more Americans learn about them, the process for making these coverage decisions becomes increasingly important.

HCFA recently published its new proposal to completely overhaul the decision-making process, and I applaud the hard work and time HCFA staff put into developing this new process. HCFA has been attempting to make these much needed changes for over a decade, and it was Dr. Jeffrey Kang's leadership and thoughtful approach at HCFA that finally brought the effort to fruition.

HCFA's proposal is a good first step in making the coverage process transparent, timely and understandable. However, I believe there are a few additional issues that need to be addressed.

In addition to addressing the issue of appeals—which my good friend and Health Subcommittee Chairman Thomas is working on—and timely payment and coding updates—which I outlined in my other bill, H.R. 2030, the Medicare Patient Access to Technology Act—we also need to ensure the process encourages HCFA to work in a collaborative way with those petitioning for coverage.

For example, current Food and Drug Administration law provides for early meetings and a written agreement between manufacturers and the FDA on the studies to be done for pre-market approvals. Both parties have found this to be a beneficial tool because both know what is required. In addition, I am told FDA staff has found it improves their efficiency when agreed-upon data is submitted for review.

I strongly believe HCFA's coverage process should include a similar step.

HCFA currently allows stakeholders to come in and informally discuss the required data, but no written agreement is ever reached. The

importance of this agreement cannot be understated. Without an agreement, HCFA is not required to accept the data given to them, even when HCFA initially suggested it at the early meeting. HCFA's ability to continuously change what constitutes appropriate data has left many companies in my district stuck in an endless loop of data collection. In fact, one constituent company of mine, Empi, has been petitioning for a coverage decision for over 7 years!

Given the handful of national coverage decisions that are announced each year, I believe HCFA's informal discussions could be transformed into more formalized collaborative meetings at which binding agreements could be written. That's why I am introducing this legislation today to require HCFA to meet with stakeholders and develop an agreement on the required data, should the stakeholders request to do so.

Just as with the FDA process, there are exceptions in the legislation to give HCFA flexibility for changing the agreement should it become aware of a new, substantial scientific issue that would impact its ability to adequately review the technology or procedure. In addition, should HCFA wish to change the agreement for other reasons, it can do so with the written consent of the stakeholders.

These meetings and agreements are practical and beneficial additions to the coverage decision-making process. I urge my colleagues to cosponsor this legislation to further improve this important process and ensure Medicare beneficiaries have timely access to life-saving and life-enhancing medical innovations.

INTRODUCTION OF A BILL TO
NAME A POST OFFICE IN EAST
CHICAGO, INDIANA AFTER
LANCE CORPORAL HAROLD
GOMEZ

HON. PETER J. VISCLOSKY

OF INDIANA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, June 24, 1999

Mr. VISCLOSKY. Mr. Speaker, today I was joined by the other nine members of the Indiana House delegation in introducing legislation to name a post office in East Chicago, Indiana, after a true hero of my congressional district, Marine Corps Lance Corporal Harold Gomez. Lance Corporal Gomez was the first citizen of Northwest Indiana to give his life for his country during the Vietnam War. My colleagues and I firmly believe that the time has come to honor him in a way that will value his memory and his sacrifice. To name a post office after Lance Corporal Gomez, a place that is synonymous in our country with the center of a community's life, is an appropriate way to accomplish this worthy goal.

Lance Corporal Gomez was born in East Chicago in 1946 and graduated from East Chicago's Washington High School in June 1965. After working briefly at Inland Steel Company, he enlisted in the U.S. Marine Corps and was ordered to Vietnam in 1966. A fire team leader in a rifle company of the Third Marine Division, a land mine killed Lance Corporal Gomez on